

A Center for Catholic Social Thought within a Catholic University: A Latin American Experience

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Introduction

This paper presents a profile of the Center for Catholic Social Thought grounded in the context of a Latin American catholic university experience. It starts with some reflections on its identity and its particular epistemological approach, then describes its main activities and presents its principal challenges linked to some current cultural settings.

The Identity of a Center for Catholic Social Thought within a Catholic University

According to John Paul II in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*: “the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture”¹. These particular dimensions of reality: society and culture, and its relation with Christianity, represent multiple challenges; facing them implies also multiple initiatives.

The Center for Catholic Social Thought (CCST) in the *Universidad Católica San Pablo* (UCSP) represents one of those initiatives oriented to fulfill the mission of being a Catholic University. But even if integrity and coherence may be sufficient to legitimate the existence of a center dedicated to the social thought in a catholic perspective, it is necessary to present further reasons to explain why in this particular circumstances – a Catholic university located in Latin America, exactly in Peru – the existence the CCST is also a way to deepen further in the university catholic identity’ i.e. to make of the word “Catholic” something more than an adjective in the name of an organization.

There are many arguments that legitimate the existence of the CCST within a catholic university, however the intra-university and inter-university legitimational levels are some of the most important. The legitimation at an intra-university level refers to a necessary strategic alignment between the

¹ John Paul II, (1990), *Ex corde ecclesiae*, n. 13.

mission of the Catholic University and the mission of its CCST. In this case the mission of the UCSP states:

“The San Pablo Catholic University is an academic community inspired by the orientations and life of the Catholic Church. [This academic community] seeks the truth and promotes the integral formation of the person, with the light of faith and with the efforts of human reason, through activities such as research, teaching and extension programs; in order to contribute to the full development of the human being and to form a culture that follows the truth revealed in the Christian faith”².

Following the identity of the UCSP the CCST understands itself as follows:

“The CCST is an initiative [...] that brings together an academic, interdisciplinary and specialized group of persons, to study and develop Catholic Social Thought through reflection, dissemination and collaboration with other similar institutions. The main task of the CCST is to address the social challenges of our times at regional and global levels taking in consideration the social teachings of the Catholic Church. The CCST develops its activities in alignment with the guidelines of the Pontifical Council for ‘Justice and Peace’ and especially with the Pontifical Magisterium”³.

Using the phrase ‘strategic alignment’, as it is understood in organizational studies, to make the argument for a CCST can sound restrictive; but in fact the opposite is true, the development of the CCST activities complements and is complemented by the activities of other initiatives, in particular with the Center of Studies for the Person and the Culture⁴.

The challenge *Ex corde Ecclesiae* puts for Catholic University refers to the problems of culture and society, understanding culture in a humanistic and a socio-historical way⁵. According to A. García Quesada in addition to this useful and necessary distinction of the two dimensions of culture, should be noted that the human dimension is the foundation of the socio-historical one. There are at least three reasons for this: firstly, because the diverse socio-historical settings are generated by concrete human beings and not by some impersonal institution; secondly, because, even implicitly, the whole historical socio-cultural settings are generated to permit the realization of

² Universidad Católica San Pablo, (2007), *Identidad y Misión*. In the case of the documents of the UCSP the translations are own.

³ Universidad Católica San Pablo, (2008), *Acta de Creación del Centro de Pensamiento Social Católico*.

⁴ The Center of Studies for the Person and the Culture dedicates its efforts to the analysis, study and research of the anthropological approach of Christianity, the relation between faith and reason, the dialogue between philosophy and theology and its consequences for culture in general.

⁵ John Paul II, (1990), *Ex corde ecclesiae*, n. 13, note 16.

human life and thirdly because the human person must be the point of reference to identify the issues in which a particular socio-historical culture, benefit or hinder the realization of human being⁶.

In that sense a center dedicated to the reflection on the Christian anthropology and his relation with culture in general, is very important to fulfill the mission of being a catholic university; but a Center for Catholic Social Thought focuses its attention in the dynamism of this particular anthropological approach and especially to its developments in a particular socio-historical reality, in our case the Peruvian and Latin American realm. In other words, a CCST is aimed to deepen in the characteristics of a Christian social humanism in a particular context.

The legitimation of the CCST at an inter-university level refers to the expectations that civil society had towards universities and especially towards catholic universities. Since the Latin American ethos has been undeniably fecundated with Christianity, a long tradition of social activities from catholic institutions and organizations – including especially catholic universities⁷ – are in the middle of the actual discussions on integral and solidary development of Latin American nations⁸.

Activities realizing the identity

Catholic universities in Latin America –and also all over the world– are facing several challenges; for example, according to P. Morandé universities are recognized traditionally as institutions able to generate social integration and to promote directly or indirectly communitarian wisdom⁹; however this

⁶ García Quesada, A. (2003), *El Desafío Cultural de las Universidades Católicas. Consideraciones en torno a Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, pp. 67-68.

⁷ Here is important to remember that the first universities in Latin America were founded already during the 16th century (there are discussions regarding the oldest university of Latin America, some historicists argue that the oldest university was ‘founded’ in Santo Domingo (Dominica Republic) with Pope’s Paul III Bull in *Apostolatus Culmine* on the 28 October 1538 named the Real y Pontificia Universidad de Santo Tomás de Aquino, others argue that the Real y Pontifical Universidad de San Marcos of Lima (Perú) is the first and oldest university founded in Latin America. This was founded on the 12 May 1551 with a Royal Decree of King Charles I of Spain and reaffirmed on the 25 July 1571 with Pope’s Pius V Bull *Exponi Nobis*). Harvard University, the oldest university founded in what today are the United States of America, was founded in 1636, more than 50 years the first University founded in Latin America.

⁸ Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, (2007), *Documento Conclusivo de Aparecida*, n. 341-346 and specially n. 498.

⁹ Morandé, P. (2006), *Desafíos al pesamiento católico desde el horizonte latinoamericano*, p. 19-20.

universities traditional mission is threatened for current approaches to the university activity which tries to reduce wisdom to knowledge and practical skills, economizing education and disintegrating the unity of knowledge in wisdom¹⁰. It is true that higher education should provide students with the needed skills to perform a professional activity, but this cannot imply avoid to teaching topics dedicated to the integration of knowledge as liberal arts.

Precisely in the search of ways to avoid this and other risks, a CCST demonstrates being useful by developing diverse activities to conciliate and legitimate competitive needs of knowledge in the academic university education and the exigencies of wisdom. To clarify this is helpful to present some of the activities that the CCST performs within two mayor areas of university life: researching and teaching.

Research

Research is the most important task being developed at the CCST, since the “search of truth” is a fundamental assignment of every university; this is a particular way in which the CCST contribute to its mission. A double level of impact was selected to develop this task:

At a regional level it seeks to identify the particularities of Catholic Social Thought and Social Doctrine of the Church¹¹ in specific socio-geographical realities; the studies reach progressively bigger areas, focusing their developments initially in the City of Arequipa, than Peru and so on until arriving to a Latin American level. In some cases the results of this research processes are presented in the Bulletin of the Social Doctrine of the Church, a quarterly publication edited in collaboration with the Card. Van Thuân International Observatory for the Social Doctrine of the Church, which appears in three different editions being the CCST responsible for the Spanish edition for Latin America.

¹⁰ It is also to remember that some reductive approaches regarding reality and social sciences in Latin America were born in university milieus, unfortunately also in catholic universities. This idea was also reflected in the Homily on the Occasion of the mass for the Tenth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Universidad Católica San Pablo held by Mons. Kay Martin Schmallhausen Panizo, see: Universidad Católica San Pablo (2007) *Identidad y Misión*.

¹¹ Social Doctrine of the Church refers to the official documents of the Church regarding social topics, Catholic Social Thought embraces also the academic discussion on this topics, its further development and in some cases also the practical applications.

At a global level, the CCST aims to provide a comparative study of the development and application of Catholic Social Thought and the Ecclesial Magisterium, paying attention to intellectual developments in Latin America and to the Latin American Episcopal Magisterium in the context of local and global problems. The results of this are published in the Reports on the Social Doctrine of the Church in the World, publication edited in Italy by the Card. Van Thuân International Observatory for the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Teaching

Teaching acquires its own meaning, as the transmission of what was revealed in research, building fruitful links between thinking and dissemination of knowledge. Catholic Social Thought is considered at UCSP as a significant part of the integral formation of students; for this reason a course on Catholic Social Thought is mandatory for all the students in all the Professional Schools of the University¹².

The objective with it is not only to increase the knowledge of the students in the field of the catholic tradition, but also help them to develop practical wisdom, a capacity that can arise and be developed by facing the tension between knowing particular principles – in this case the principles of the Church's social teachings – and the need to find solutions to problems and also dilemmatic situations in the professional and day-to-day live¹³.

Another activity of teaching regards not only students but also professors; in some cases Catholic Social Thought is an unknown field for faculty members, to tackle this and in order to deepen in the catholic identity of the UCSP, the CCST designed and offer a structured Faculty Development Program focused on the mutual enrichment between Catholic Social Thought and specialized knowledge. The first experience was made with economic and managerial issues.

A particular epistemological approach

All the activities of the CCST are made from particular epistemological approach, anchored in Christian realism, interdisciplinarity and the use of the discernment as a method.

¹² To deepen in the structure of the curriculum of the UCSP see: Loza Adauí, C.; Velázquez Delgado, J. & Quintanilla Pérez-Wicht, A. (2006) Mainstreaming the Social Catholic Thought in a Business School.

¹³ For the development of practical wisdom in the catholic perspective see the contribution of André Habisch and Cristian Loza Adauí in this book.

Christian realism

Pope John Paul II explains at the very beginning of *Ex corde ecclesiae* what he calls a ‘privileged task’ of catholic universities, namely, “to unite existentially by intellectual effort *two orders of reality* that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth”¹⁴.

To reach the union of these two orders of reality – even within social sciences – implies by one hand to understand the human being in a holistic way, since “Christ fully reveals man to man himself”¹⁵ starting from a particular Christian anthropology to illuminate social phenomena¹⁶ becomes the path to follow.

On the other hand, remembering what Card. Joseph Ratzinger in his visit to Perú mentioned: “The realism of Church’s social teachings is evidenced by not promising a paradise land, or a definitely positive and unchanging society. What benefit have utopian enthusiasm, if it handles the man to a promise that eventually will revealed itself faked because its presuppositions were false?”¹⁷, an approach to the catholic social thought anchored in Christian realism attend and work towards an integral human development being aware of the limitations and contingency of human solutions¹⁸.

Interdisciplinarity

The need for a deeper and more holistic look at reality, that allows to recover the fundamentals of the sciences and disciplines in order to overcome the fragmentary and atomized approaches of knowledge is a very central task. Interdisciplinarity is a particular way to reach this goal.

¹⁴ John Paul II, (1990), *Ex corde ecclesiae*, n. 1.

¹⁵ Vatican Council II (1965), *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22. See here also Ehret, J. (2009), *Katholisch: Christus als Mitte. Zur Frage nach Einheit und Anspruch des Katholischen*.

¹⁶ It is important to remember here that the UCSP has a center dedicated to study the Person and the Culture in a catholic perspective, the importance of this center was also remembered by the president of the UCSP in his speech with occasion of the tenth anniversary of the foundation. See Universidad Católica San pablo, (2007), *Identidad y Misión*.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, J. (1986), *Iglesia comunicadora de vida*. p. 37. Here is also important to remember that unfortunately in Latin America not all the approaches and developments of Catholic Social Thought have embraced a Christian realism.

¹⁸ See for example: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, (2005), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 121, 183.

The Social Doctrine of the Church owns an interdisciplinary character¹⁹, and the Catholic Social Thought profits also from the interdisciplinary approach²⁰. That allows firstly: to consider the limitations of the particular sciences in order to build bridges with others and secondly: to build an order between the different types of knowledge and disciplines. These two benefits of interdisciplinarity also permit to arrive to deeper and wider levels of wisdom, reinforcing also a Christian realistic perspective.

Interdisciplinarity is in that sense important because for example, social sciences not only describe a particular part of reality but with its conclusions, methods and theories also transform and orient further developments. Not considering this can lead academics and students to consider particular sciences as morally neutral ventures or even worse as auto-referential knowledge, failing in reductionisms, which are present in all sciences²¹. For example, Pope Benedict XVI remember that referring to the relation between economy and ethics: “The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, nor inherently inhuman and opposed to society. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner”²².

Discernment method

The compendium of the social doctrine of the Church describes the discernment as the method to practice the catholic social thought²³ as follows:

“...a method of discernment, at both the personal and community levels, structured around certain key elements: knowledge of the situations, analyzed with the help of the social sciences and other appropriate tools; systematic reflection on these realities in the light of the unchanging message of the Gospel

¹⁹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, (2005), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 16; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 31.

²⁰ Crepaldi, G. & Fontana, S. (2006), *La dimensione interdisciplinare della dottrina sociale della Chiesa*.

²¹ See the series of articles dedicated to the reductionism in the different sciences published systematically in the *Bulletin of Social Doctrine of the Church* during the years 2009 and 2010.

²² Benedict XVI, (2009), *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 36.

²³ Pope Benedict XVI remembered briefly this method lately in the *Message to Card. Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson on the Occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Justice and peace*, n. 6.

and the Church's social teaching; identification of choices aimed at assuring that the situation will evolve positively²⁴.

Here is important to mention that it is not an application of some principles in a particular situation. A systematic reflection of a particular reality in the light of the Gospel implies something more, that is an active intervention of a theological dimension; forgetting this can denaturalize the method and also its results. An indirect objective of this method is also to avoid a deductive imposition of the catholic social thought principles to a socio-economic reality, as the Card. Ratzinger said: "Christian faith has never presumed to impose a rigid framework on social and political questions, conscious that the historical dimension requires men and women to live in imperfect situations, which are also susceptible to rapid change"²⁵.

Main Challenges of running the Center for Catholic Social Thought

The challenges vary from day-to-day management difficulties to socio-cultural problems at national, regional and international levels. To identify each challenge represents itself a CCSTs' task. Here will be briefly explained the most important of this challenges.

Managerial challenges are important, because they also show challenges faced by many Catholic institutions in general. One of the many management challenges relates to the identification and attraction of qualified personnel to work in an organization of this type. Since Catholic Social Thought requires an interdisciplinary approach, a wide and extensive training to approach social issues from an interdisciplinary perspective is needed. For recruiting activities this means to find experts not only in a specific social science or liberal art, but also knowledge of the Social Doctrine of the Church and its developments, thus recruiting for strategic positions evidence difficulties that sometimes slows the growth and development of organizations.

Another management issue that must be taken into account is the financing of such organizations. Certainly many church organizations enjoy a certain freedom of management to the extent that financing is secured by Church structures; but in the case of other organizations – such as the CCST – funding is accompanied by a legitimate return on investment expectation. The development of measures of success for activities that promote Catholic

²⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, (2005), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 568.

²⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, (2002), *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, n. 7.

Social Thought is itself a management challenge since many of the activities undertaken are not aimed at generating merely economic benefits for themselves. A creative tension between financing and economic results can only be productive if the funding organization is willing to accept management indicators that are not only economic.

At a national level, Peru faces a wide range of challenges in the social field²⁶ perhaps the most representative of them is referred to the identification of ways of reconciliation in Peruvian society. Peru has suffered a series of social ills that met the threshold of violence through terrorism during the '80s. Although social conflict has been addressed systematically by some sectors of the Peruvian academy²⁷, the efforts made by those who have proposed reconciliation as a social science category and as a theological category to better understand the dynamics of building a fraternal society²⁸, have not reached a wide audience out of Peru and Latin America. Social reconciliation is thus the challenge and opportunity for achieving integral human development²⁹.

Catholic social thought faces at regional and international level many challenges. Latin American countries are in many cases called developing countries with emerging economies, but on the way to reach development these countries are being focus of a series of cultural, political and legislative campaigns against basic institutions. Integral and solidary development of Latin American countries is therefore limited for example by attacks against life and family through campaigns and organizations that have large financial and political support and that are sometimes disguised as development policies. Added to this is possible to mention other global problems as an increasing secularism and an aggressive laicism, which seeks to expel faith of the public life showing also the social consequences of nihilism³⁰.

²⁶ Some of this social challenges and it's economic consequences are described in: Loza Adai, C. "Perú," in Visser, W. and Tolhurst, N. (Eds.) (2010) *The World Guide to CSR*, p. 297-298.

²⁷ Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, (2003), *Informe Final*.

²⁸ Since 1985 a systematic study of reconciliation theology has been carried on as an alternative one to some other social trends that have fallen into the ideological fallacies, unfortunately even in sectors near to the Church. To deepen in the Reconciliation Theology see: Figari, L. F. (2000), *Aportes para una Teología de la Reconciliación*.

²⁹ Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, (2008) *Documento Conclusivo de Aparecida*, n. 98, 354-355.

³⁰ To deepen in the principal problems addressed in Latin America see the chapters dedicated to the Social Doctrine of the Church in five continents present on this publications: Crepaldi G. and Fontana, S. (Eds.) (2009), *Primo Rapporto sulla*

Conclusive remark

Every Catholic University can find in Catholic Social Thought a fundamental guide. Thus deepened in it, in order to understand in which ways CST relates and illuminates the diverse specific disciplines becomes also fundamental because it is from the assets of the Social Doctrine of the Church from which it seeks to contribute to social, civic, economic, in a word integral development of the human being, the city, the country, the continent and the world. As it is presented, the efforts the CCST made to contribute to this task are humble; the challenges are always higher but by no means impossible.

To conclude it is important to stress that although for various reasons the Social Doctrine of the Church is considered a sign of contradiction in the world –and unfortunately also within the Church³¹ and the culture evangelization mission was always and still being a global challenge; in this task is also played the future of person as person.

This evangelizing mission makes sense only if it is considered that:

“In our days, when in vast areas of the world the faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel, the overriding priority is to make God present in this world and to show men and women the way to God. Not just any god, but the God who spoke on Sinai; to that God whose face we recognize in a love which presses ‘to the end’ (cf. *Jn* 13:1) – in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The real problem at this moment of our history is that God is disappearing from the human horizon, and, with the dimming of the light which comes from God, humanity is losing its bearings, with increasingly evident destructive effects. Leading men and women to God, to the God who speaks in the Bible: this is the supreme and fundamental priority of the Church and of the Successor of Peter at the present time”³².

Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa nel Mondo; Crepaldi G. and Stefano F., (Eds.) (2010), Secondo Rapporto sulla Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa nel Mondo.

³¹ Arias Padilla, D. et al., 2009: La Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa segno di Contraddizione, in: Crepaldi, G. and Fontana, S. (Eds.) (2010), Secondo Rapporto sulla Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa nel Mondo, p. 21-30.

³² Benedict XVI, (2009), Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre.

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